

Congressman Jesse L. Jackson Jr., today voted against legislation funding the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services and Education. The bill went down in unprecedented defeat, by a vote of 224 to 209. Congressman Jackson voted against the bill because "the proposed cuts in the bill were draconian and unconscionable."

Congressman Jackson said, "Since I started serving on the Labor-H subcommittee almost seven years ago, I have fought to end disparities - disparities in employment, education and especially in health. Health disparities are real. If you are black in this country, your life expectancy is 66 years. If you are white in this country, it's 74 years. Infant mortality is twice as high for African American babies as it is for white babies.

"Fortunately, institutions like the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences have laid out a framework for ending these disparities. One of the recommendations IOM made was to increase the number of minority health professionals. The cuts in this bill would have done exactly the opposite, cutting health professions programs by almost \$200 million. For example, cuts to the Centers of Excellence Program will eliminate 30 programs at Minority Serving Institutions, negatively impacting approximately 1,000 under-represented minority students, and almost 180 under-represented faculty at these schools. Proposed cuts in the Health Careers Opportunity Program would have hurt thousands of minority and disadvantaged students, some as young as kindergarteners. That's just irresponsible.

"I think a society says a lot by the way that it treats the most vulnerable of its citizens. I believe we live in a 'united' states, and like a chain, we are only as strong as our weakest link. What does it say about a society that approves tax cuts for millionaires instead of trying to solve what ails the weakest among us? Are we saying we are not strong and compassionate, but weak and uncaring?

"Many of my colleagues in the House of Representatives have said, 'Jesse, this is a tight budget year.' This tight budget year was not created by immaculate conception! Some of us voted to make it a tough budget year! Saying it is going to be a tough budget year is like a farmer saying he is going to have a bad harvest because he didn't plant any seeds. This is not a natural disaster like a drought. This disaster was of our making.

"A reckless bill lost today, but the American people won," Jackson concluded.